

OVS Outreach

Fall 2021

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From the Director's Desk



LGBTQ+ individuals are four times more likely than non-LGBTQ+ people to be victims of violent crime. According to the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, those in the LGBTQ+ community experienced 71.1 victimizations of violent crime per 1,000, compared to 19.2 per 1,000 for those who are

non-LGBTQ+. A 2020 report in Science magazine, based on data from the National Crime Victim Survey from 2017, concluded that these include all categories of violent crime except robbery, including sexual and physical assault. Hate Crime in New York State 2019 Annual Report indicates that anti-LGBTQ+ crimes made up 27 percent of all hate crimes in which a person endured violence. The FBI reported that among all hate motivated crimes in 2019, gender-based hate crimes experienced the highest growth. Of those crimes, anti-transgender crimes rose 42 percent and anti-gender-nonconforming incidents rose 262 percent.

Anti-gay, anti-transgender, and anti-gender-nonconforming rhetoric is unfortunately nothing new but has resulted in an increase in hate crimes and the adoption of anti-LGBTQ+ laws in some states. The Human Rights Campaign found that legislators across the United States put forth more than 250 anti-LGBTQ+ bills in 2021. These bills impact a wide range of concerns for the LGBTQ+ community, including access to appropriate medical care, youth participation in sports consistent with one's gender identity, the denial of services to LGBTQ+ individuals on the basis of religious belief, and barring schools from teaching curriculum about the community and its history. Just recently, the governor of Texas signed a law prohibiting students in K-12 from participating in sports teams that align with their gender identity.

The New York State Office of Victim Services (OVS) is here to support the LGBTQ+ community in New York State with financial compensation and through the funding of Victim Assistance Programs (VAPs).

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OVS Speakers Bureau Call for Presenters!

The OVS Speakers Bureau is a bi-monthly information sharing seminar for OVS staff and allied professionals on a variety of topics, including:

- Victim assistance program spotlights;
- Victim service provider testimonials;
- Innovation in victim services;
- Victim services best practices;
- Underserved victims focus;
- Self-care;
- And much more.

Each Speakers Bureau seminar will last approximately 1.5 hours, including Q&A. The wealth of information shared at these seminars will seek to educate attendees on the tremendous impact victim services have on the lives of victims from across New York State.

We are excited to announce our schedule for the upcoming 2022 Speakers Bureau:

- Jan. 25
- March 22
- May 17
- July 19
- Sept. 20
- Nov. 15

NOTE: All sessions run from 1:30 - 3 p.m., inclusive of Q&A, and will be held virtually, via Zoom.

If you are interested in presenting, or know others who would like to be considered for the seminar series, please email training@ovs.ny.gov with the subject line: OVS 2022 Speakers Bureau. ■



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Victim Services**

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From the Director's Desk

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While all VAPs can assist LGBTQ+ survivors, there are a number of programs that have a particular focus and expertise working with this community. These include New York City-based programs like that of The Center, celebrating the LGBTQ+ community and focusing on restoration and advocacy since 1983. Over the last 40 years, the Anti-Violence Project has led organizing efforts within the LGBTQ+ community and provided education, advocacy and support to affected community members. In Our Own Voices, Inc., located in Albany, serves the LGBTQ+ POC community, amplifying diverse voices and those of allies. In Our Own Voices has an upcoming annual national health conference, **"Unity Through Diversity"** from Nov. 17 through Nov. 19. This conference will provide excellent discussions on promoting social justice, healthy sexuality, activism and violence-free living.



As always, thank you for your continued commitment to providing the quality services to victims of crime across New York State.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth Cronin'.

Elizabeth Cronin, Esq.

Closing the Gap: Expanding Access to Culturally Specific Services for the LGBTQ+ Community

Data analyses from the 2019 National Crime Victimization Survey and other independent reports found that LGBTQ+ community members are up to four times more likely to experience violent crime yet are less likely to report or seek help than non-LGBTQ+ victims.

A 'safe' environment must be created, and positive acknowledgement of the unique challenges faced by those seeking assistance is required to meet the challenge of providing comprehensive and effective services to victims of crime. As self-defined social identities have evolved to become more diverse, the challenge to provide inclusive services by demonstrating awareness and understanding of culturally specific and individualized lived experiences has become critical to providing these vital services to communities that are often marginalized.

To provide 'safe' environments for help seekers, OVS funds VAPs across New York State through the federal Victims of Crime Act formula grant. OVS also co-hosts the Spectrum Conference for service professionals seeking a better understanding of the diverse and complex issues faced by LGBTQ+ victims.

To ease client apprehension, enhance outreach efforts and facilitate engagement, In Our Own Voices (Albany) and the New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project emphasize ensuring that employees are representative of those within the communities they serve. In Our Own Voices offers advocacy, emergency assistance, and victim support, while the Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project offers these same services, plus crisis counseling and legal assistance.

OVS appreciates all providers for their hard work and dedication towards closing the gaps. ■

OVS: Evolving Over the Years to Support All Victims of Crime

OVS is one of the oldest state-run programs of its kind, established by law in 1966 with a focus on the physical impact of crimes. A broken arm, a knife slash during an assault or a gunshot wound could be easily seen and understood as the result of crimes and the toll taken on victims.

As the understanding of victimization evolved, so too did OVS. The agency's enacting statute has been amended many times to recognize that not all crimes result in physical wounds. Individuals without physical injuries, often domestic violence related crimes, were added to the list of claimants who could benefit from the agency's assistance. The list of crimes later grew to include additional traumatic crimes.

We experienced a similar evolution with laws related to hate crimes in New York. The federal government enacted a hate crimes statute in the late 1960s, but New York State did not produce its own law until 2000. New York enacted the "Hate Crimes Act of 2000," providing that the commission of certain specified crimes based on a belief or perception of the perpetrator regarding the race, color, national origin, ancestry, gender, religion, age, disability, or sexual orientation of a victim qualified as hate crimes and were subject to more serious charges and penalties.

In 2019, New York State expanded its hate crime law to include offenses regarding gender identity or expression, and, in 2020, terrorism-related charges, including the new crime of domestic terrorism motivated by hate, were added to the list of crimes specified as hate crimes. While many of these crimes involved physical injuries, which OVS could already cover under its general provisions, the new state law encompassed some crimes which do not necessarily result in physical injury.

Part of the 2018 Enacted Budget [Part G, Chapter 55 of the Laws of 2017] bridged that gap for non-injured victims of hate crimes by amending the law to expand eligibility to certain non-physically injured victims of crime, including those who are victims of hate crimes. The following year, the state expanded the reimbursement available to all eligible, non-physically injured victims of crime, including victims of hate crimes, to include shelter and crime scene cleanup expenses [Chapter 204 of the Laws of 2018].

Advocating for the rights and benefits of all victims of crime is a critical component of the OVS mission. Under its enacting statute, OVS "advise(s) and assist(s) the Governor in developing policies designed to recognize the legitimate rights, needs and interests of crime victims." As demographics change and crime evolves, OVS will continue to adapt, respond and develop the necessary policies to meet the rights, needs and interests of all victims of crime. ■

Connect with Your Peers — Join VAP Connect Today!

OVS reminds service providers to join [VAP Connect](#), an online community for VAPs funded by the agency.

VAP Connect is designed to provide a platform for victim assistance programs to share information, build networks and obtain more tools to help innocent victims of crime in New York State. OVS also uses VAP Connect to provide important updates and announcements for VAPs and their staff.

Learn more by watching our [Launch Q&A webinar](#) and accessing the official [VAP Connect Tip Sheet](#), both of which can help you get started.

More than 300 people have joined so far. Please join, engage and start connecting today! ■

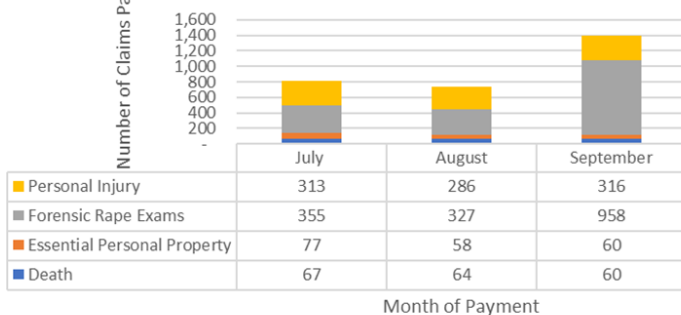


Compensation Quarter 3 Claims Summary

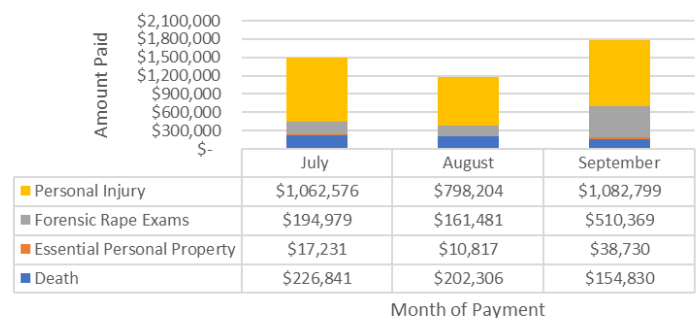
The New York State Office of Victim Services provides compensation for innocent victims of crime and their families. From July 1 to Sept. 30, of this year 2,941 claims were paid by OVS Compensation, totaling more than \$4.6 million.

During the same quarter, OVS awarded 145 emergency awards, totaling more than \$380,000, to victims and their families. From July to September, there was a 37 percent increase in emergency awards and OVS received 3,231 claims, accepting 3,083. It should be noted 'accepted' claims should not be measured as a proportion of 'received' claims, as there can be a delay between when a claim is received by the agency and when it is accepted into our system. The largest proportion of accepted claims were for assaults, followed by other homicides, and sexual assaults.

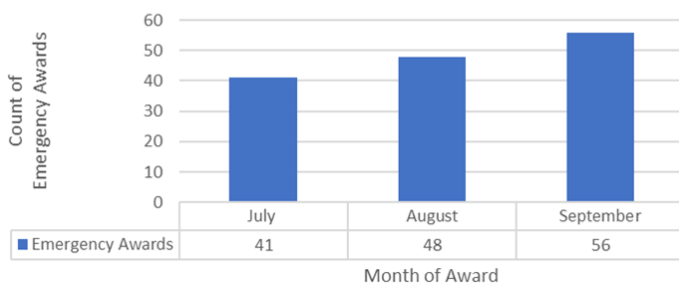
OVS Compensation Paid Claim Counts
by Month by Claim Type



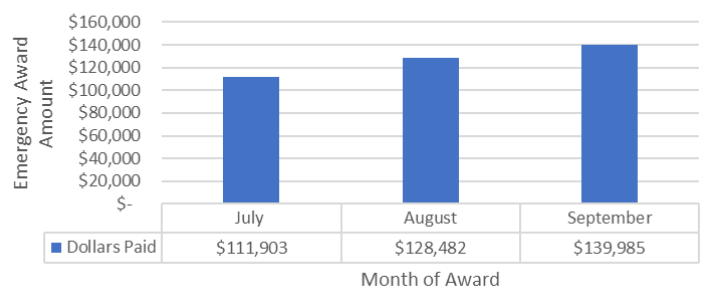
OVS Compensation Paid Claim Amounts
by Month by Claim Type



OVS Compensation
Count of Emergency Awards
by Month



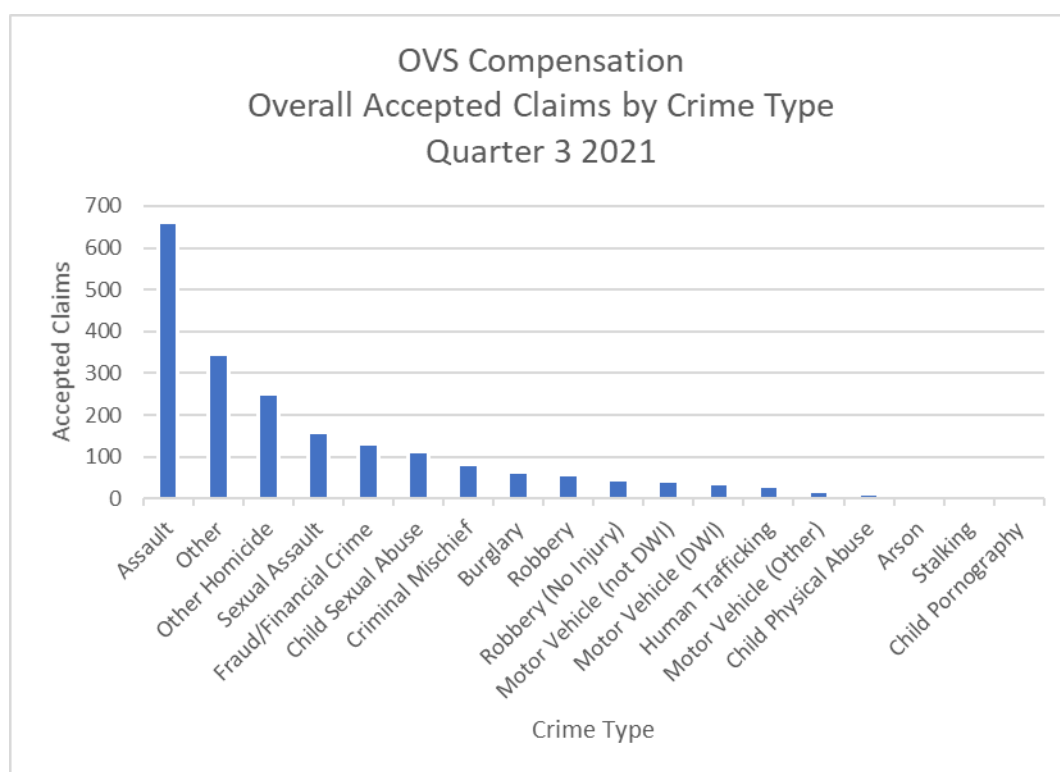
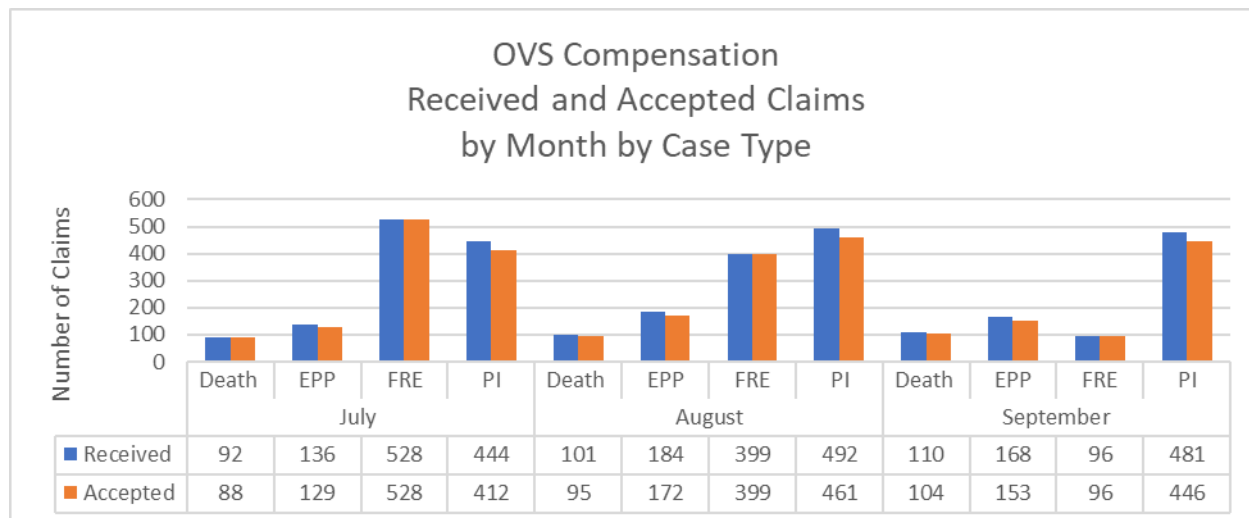
OVS Compensation
Sum of Emergency Award Amounts
by Month



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Compensation Quarter 3 Claims Summary

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OVS Welcomes Lauren Szczesny, Community Engagement Liaison



OVS is excited to welcome Community Engagement Liaison Lauren Szczesny to the Training and Outreach unit. In this new role, Lauren is responsible for cultivating and facilitating inter-agency and stakeholder relationships to ensure OVS resources are reaching underserved victims and communities.

Lauren will work closely with VAPs, hospitals, food banks, nursing homes, schools, youth and juvenile treatment centers, law enforcement, etc., to ensure statewide priorities are aligned with what is happening in the field of victim services.

Her efforts not only aim to increase use of services available to victims but will result in evidence-informed statewide priorities. The work Lauren does will serve to enhance the state's commitment to providing the highest quality services to victims of crime in New York State, by identifying gaps in services and barriers to accessing those services.

Committed to serving those affected by trauma as they rebuild their lives, Lauren previously worked as a disability and outreach coordinator. She worked with veterans with service-related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injuries.

Lauren holds a Bachelor of Arts in Public Policy and Management, as well as a Master of Public Administration from the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy at the University at Albany. Lauren also holds certifications from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative and The Institute of Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care.

Reach out to Lauren at lauren.szczesny@ovs.ny.gov to connect today! ■

OVS Resource Connect

OVS Resource Connect (ovs.ny.gov/connect) is a concern-based search engine that connects individuals with potential resources for crime victims across New York State.

Individuals can search for crime victim services, information and resources by their particular concerns (for example, anxiety, caregiving, grief and loss, drug use) and/or keywords, such as advocate or safe housing; and where they live or work. The search engine immediately returns information provided by OVS-funded victim assistance programs, which can help individuals and connect them with additional services and supports that are not directly offered by OVS.

Click the button below to access OVS Resource Connect:

ovs.ny.gov/connect

Sometimes the Victim is the Teacher

OVS was honored to host Alissa Torres, essayist, educator, and author of *American Widow* to speak with attendees at the OVS 2021 Conference about her experience as a 9/11 widow and how she uses writing to process and heal trauma.

Submitted by Alissa Torres. Essayist, Educator, Author of American Widow

I became a student of trauma on September 11, 2001 when my brother called me and said: “A plane just hit the World Trade Center. Didn’t Eddie just start working there?” Eddie Torres, my husband, had just started his new job at Cantor Fitzgerald, high up in the North Tower on September 10th.



As a 9/11 widow, 7-1/2 months pregnant when Eddie was murdered, the trauma I experienced through his loss and through all the things I saw on that day, became central to my life. But as I experienced it all, I also observed myself and wrote about it all, at first scribbling all the time in notebooks to stay sane and to try to wrap my mind around the pain and surreal nature of my experiences, and then later in crafted published essays and in my graphic novel memoir American Widow.

So, whenever it’s possible for me to learn something new about trauma, whether it’s by analyzing my own experiences or by absorbing the wisdom of others, I’m all in. This was especially how I felt when the Ezra Klein Show, one of my favorite podcasts, aired an episode entitled, “This Conversation Will Change How You Think About Trauma.” In this episode, the amazingly smart, thoughtful and articulate Ezra Klein interviewed Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, specifically about his bestselling book, “The Body Keeps the Score.”

They talked about methodologies that included talk therapy, EMDR, LSD, bike riding and even tango dancing. They acknowledged the unknowns involved with some of these therapies, how they do amazing things for some people, although they can’t say exactly why or how they work. They also discussed how, in the future, we may look back at our current state of therapeutics and realize how little we knew.

And all the while, I kept noticing that coursing through their entire conversation were references to victims’ narratives, autobiographies and stories. I kept rooting for them to go to a place in their conversation where they specifically recognized that victims like me, writing our own stories, is a powerful therapeutic. But they never fully made it there.

And, while it was disappointing that they didn’t, it was OK, because two days later I did get to talk about this at OVS’ conference, 20 Years Later: Mass Casualty Events and the Evolution of Victims Services. I’d already felt so honored to be present there, able to share my experiential wisdom with an agency that had helped me so much for all these past years (and continues to help me). But, because of that podcast, it became even more meaningful for me to share what I knew about writing as a therapeutic tool through a session called, “Small Words, Big Potential, a.k.a. Who am I and Who Do I Want to Be?”

During the session, I discussed my trajectory as a victim and as someone who wrote through it all. I then shared a simple exercise with my students called, “6-Word Memoir,” to show how even the crafting of just a handful of words can improve how we feel about ourselves, especially empowering us in this era full of so much pain and trauma. Through our own words, we can gain a sense of agency, despite everything around us sometimes feeling so out of our control.

[Here are the materials I provided to my OVS class.](#)

So, go ahead write a memoir or two, and see what happens. ■

